

[Readings: Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 51; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 5:1-32]

The Sunday Scriptures today describe a God who responds urgently in response to potential losses. In our First Reading, God has entered a covenant with Israel, choosing them among all the nations. This God led Israel through the sea dry-shod, saving them from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. Yet, Israel is lost. The people who would be left behind are not just any nation, but the one chosen by God. How could God abandon his beloved? Moses recognizes something that Israel doesn't yet. They are God's beloved, chosen from the beginning. God doesn't want to lose them, and will respond with urgency.

Much of the Old Testament deals with this urgent response of a God who loves, even when it hurts. ***The first lesson we learn today is to believe that you are never alone, and even more, that you are truly loved by God.*** And by His people, the Church. God's urgency is different from our own. God searches. God seeks. God invites men and women and teens and children back into the covenant of love unto the end.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul uses the experiences of his own life to persuade others to a more faithful life in Christ. He didn't start out right. He started out arresting, jailing, bullying, persecuting and even killing those former Jews who were beginning to follow a new "Way." The Way of Christianity. Hiding nothing, St. Paul freely admits his past, and expresses his gratitude that God chose him of all people to become one of His second-generation apostles.

He is saying, "Look at the shameful, immoral and sinful things I did. Yet God chose ME to bring His Good News to the nations. If God could show mercy to one like me, why would you even question that He could be merciful to YOU?"

You and I need that Savior as much as St. Paul did. You and I are the lost people. The lost sheep. The lost coin. The Prodigal Child.

I invite you to pray, to give to God, give to Jesus, the biggest mess, the worst pile of trash, everything that is broken in you right now. Jesus works best with this kind of material when He puts it all back together, and makes something beautiful out of it all!

Sometimes we even need to forgive not only ourselves, but also God Himself. Terrible things happen in our human lives, and that is part of being human. Unfortunately, we unfairly blame God, spending years with unforgiveness in our hearts. As with any anger or resentment, if we carry it around with us long enough, it only eats us up inside, even leading to heart attacks. It drags us down and destroys our peace of mind. We have to learn to be patient with God as God is patient with us.

Someone once said that our children, regardless of their age, are God's punishment for us for being made in His image and likeness and not listening to Him or following His ways. Think about it. If we ever complain about our children, we need only look in a mirror and think of what God could be thinking and saying about us!

Then we come to the Gospel. I could spend an hour on this alone.

The father's response to the return of the younger son is what nobody would expect. We learn here that our God meets us where we are. God loves us where we are. God does not expect perfection before we are lavished with God's generous forgiveness and reconciliation.

We often think of repentance as absolute, of turning away from our bad habits and actions as being necessary BEFORE God forgives us. Don't I have to have it all together before I can expect God to forgive me, or for me to forgive myself? To think like this means that we take upon ourselves God's job, and that could be the greatest sin of all.

Have you ever experienced the kind of forgiveness that is experienced in today's Gospel? Does today's Gospel offer you any insights as to how you might find your way home again when you are feeling lost?

All are offered God's forgiveness, but not all embrace it. You and I can choose to come home, or to stay in the far country. You simply have to say "Yes" to the God Who has found you, Who has brought you home and Who, through this Eucharist, gives us all new life. AMEN!